Introduction to Web Sites

One way you to enhance your public education efforts is to place information on the World Wide Web. It can provide a dynamic way to reach consumers with up-to-date pesticide information.

The number of people who access the Web for information is growing at an exponential rate. Although there are more than 16 million Web sites at present, a user should be able to find your site by searching for it with specific key words — such as "pesticide," "water quality," or "environment." Therefore, your site should have references to the key issues that you want to relate to the Web audience.

By creating a Web site to correspond with your public education campaign, you offer customers the opportunity to find out more about the issue when and where it is convenient for them. You can also stay in closer contact with customers (by e-mail) and give them timely information that is faster than regular mail and cheaper than a fax.

If you lack the budget to create your own site, another potential option is to seek a partner with an existing site. This means finding an existing site that focuses on similar issues and concerns.

Some potential partnerships might include:

■ Local government sites (county and city offices)

■ Local clubs and garden society sites which are usually linked to their national organizations and other similar groups

■ Special interest group sites that focus on water quality, safety or environmental issues

■ Professional water industry sites

■ Retailers that have local sites with educational information

■ Recreation and park districts that offer community information

■ Adult education centers that offer gardening and home improvement courses

Most Web sites list a contact person, or at least a general phone number and address. Sometimes you'll have the option to send an e-mail message to the person responsible for maintaining the site. In this case, e-mail your offer to provide information on pesticide issues on the Web site. Be prepared to send (via e-mail, fax or regular mail) information on your pesticide issues and what materials you can provide for the Web site.

Evaluation of Method

Pros: POTWs can educate the public about pesticide issues in a forum that is increasingly being used by consumers.

Cons: The time that it takes to seek out potential sites, or create your own site, is a drawback. Creating and maintaining your own site can become extremely costly.

Other Considerations in Creating a Web Site

Establishing your own site involves a serious commitment in terms of time and money. You should undertake a cost-benefit analysis and examine your available budget before deciding to launch your own site.

Benefits

Control of information: With your own Web site, you have total control over the information and its presentation. If you partner with another site, you will most likely submit information to a designated person and they will fit it into their existing format.

Promotion of exclusive site: Having your own Web site means that you can select a name that corresponds with your public education program, and promote it throughout your campaign. If you are part of another site, some of this visibility will be lost.

Easier to update information: If you maintain your own site, it is easier to update information when convenient for you to do so. And there is minimal cost — mostly staff time — when adding new pages to your own site.

Drawbacks

Expenses involved: Creating and maintaining your own Web site can be costly and should not be considered for a low-budget campaign. Initial creation of a site, including registration of the site address, could run from $2,000 to $4,000, depending upon complexity of the job. The cost to maintain an average Web site with updates can cost several hundred dollars per month.

Keeping information updated: If you don't have a dedicated staff person responsible for your Web site, maintenance can be burdensome. If you're partnering with another site, you are usually responsible for getting them new or updated information on a set time schedule. The partner may also update the site infrequently, which could be a problem if you need to include timely information on your program.

www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/h2o

How to Set Up Your Own Web Site

Creating a Web site is more than just putting a few key messages and text together. It requires a significant amount of research and planning. Establishing your Web site also requires a commitment to updating and maintaining the site on a regular basis.

Unless you are extremely accomplished at Web site development and Internet language, you will need to contract for service. Web consultants or designers sometimes are also called webmasters.

To locate individuals or companies that develop Web sites, look in your local Yellow Pages under "Internet" or "computer consulting/multimedia." Also look for companies that advertise in newspapers or magazines. Check the business section of your local paper for advertisements or ask for recommendations from other districts or local businesses. Your Chamber of Commerce may have members who perform this work.

It is important to find a contractor who regularly designs sites for clients. You may come across companies who "do it all" with computers and the Internet. They may not have all of the expertise that you need to design and implement your site. When you have narrowed down your search, ask for references and get a list of clients and their Web site addresses, so that you can examine some finished products.

Find out both the cost for creating and maintaining your site. The estimate is usually given as a set fee for the creation of the site and a per-month cost for maintenance. Be sure to have the developer specify what is included on the estimate. Check to see what the initial fee covers and what is included on the monthly update charge. Get everything in writing. It is also a good idea to offer prospective bidders a written description of what you're trying to develop. Keep copies of all correspondence between you and the developer.

The cost of creating and maintaining a Web site may seem high for many POTW budgets, so look for alternate sources of site development. Schools are one lower-cost alternative. Students at both the high school and college level are learning programming language needed to develop sites, and they may offer their skills at a discount. Proceed cautiously with this type of arrangement.

Once you have located a reputable Web developer, then break the process of creating the Web site into five steps:

1. Research and Analysis

Objective: Define key messages and review other Web sites.

Web sites often serve as the primary introduction to an organization and its programs. It is crucial that sites convey an organization's values and central mission. Determine what key messages you would like to display on your site. Make a list of these key messages and materials you would like to have on your site. An example of such a list would be:

Key messages:

- Pesticides used in homes and gardens can contaminate waterways.

• Purchase, use and dispose of pesticides properly.

• Consider using IPM for pest prevention and pest control.

Materials:

• Explanation and background information on the problem.

• A question-and-answer section on pesticide use in the home.

• Fact sheet on pesticide use and IPM (see Appendix).

Once the key messages have been identified, review Web sites that highlight campaigns similar to yours. These sites can be found by entering a search for keywords such as pesticides, water quality, environmental campaigns, or IPM. It may also be helpful to look at printed materials you have gathered to see if they have a corresponding Web site. Review other general Web sites that you like for their format or design. Keep a master list of the Web sites you've reviewed and what you think of their content and layout. This list will be helpful when working with your Web developer. Based on the key messages you want to convey, and the type of Web sites you prefer, the developer will have concrete ideas on how to proceed with the creation of your site.

2. Structural Design

Objective:
To develop the outline of the site.

The second stage of the design process involves developing the structural foundation of the site. The list of materials that you developed in step one can now be fleshed out in a detailed outline. Talk to your developer about the structure and design of sites that you prefer.

Once the outline has been finalized, a flowchart is developed. The flowchart provides a visual structure of the site and acts as a blueprint for the remainder of the site's development. This flowchart will also provide the development team with a common working document that everyone can refer to during the production process. It also serves as the foundation from which a time line and final budget are created. Early agreement on the content structure of the site will streamline production work in later stages of development.

3. Development

Objective:
To develop concepts for graphic and content elements that effectively introduce and reinforce key messages.

The Web is a communication tool that relies on visual impact. Visual appeal and design can even override the written information on the screen. Design also determines the ease of navigating the site. It should be graphically consistent with all of the other campaign materials. During this stage of the process, the design elements of the site will be created, including home page design, secondary page templates, and specific recommendations for photography and illustration.

Visitors will tap into the content of a site according to their interests and questions. Effective sites not only provide in-depth, accessible information about programs and services, they also

allow consumers to pose questions, explore information, and request materials online. Content development is a combination of editing and writing. Once the written materials have been compiled, they can be edited for use in an interactive setting.

Remember to review the *H₂O Home to Ocean* logo and other collateral materials provided with this workbook. Using these materials as the basis for your Web site design could result in significant cost savings. The logo and other materials may be downloaded from: www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/h2o.

4. Implementation

Objective:
To merge copy and graphic elements together into a cohesive, effective Web environment.

In this step, the written content of the site is merged with graphic design templates. Once the site is constructed, it must be tested and revised until it is free of defects and typos. Throughout this final phase, the focus remains on consistent delivery of the district's communications objectives.

At this stage it is also possible to link your site with others that have relevant information on pesticide use. This added feature of your site would give consumers the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the issue. Once your site is complete and can be accessed, offer your Web site address to other relevant organizations that may provide links to your site. Search the Web for other sites that include information similar to yours. Approach the person listed as the contact

on the site, and ask if it's possible to link the two sites together. These links will allow consumers to transfer from someone else's site directly to yours with just a click of the computer mouse.

5. Ongoing Management

Objective:
To introduce an active, high-quality, sustainable Web site.

The last phase of the five-step development process is the site's introduction and management. Once your Web site is online (accessible to the public), then begin promoting the site on written materials to your customers. Managing a Web site is a continuous process. Management includes updating the site with new data, maintaining the accuracy of the text, and periodically checking links and contact information to make sure they are still in use and active.

It is important to not only update information on the site, but to also include new information on a regular basis. This motivates consumers to check back, increasing the number of times a person visits, or "hits." Set a schedule for adding updated materials. This can help you to achieve consistency in supplying new information.

➤🐟 **Consider a mechanism for gauging "traffic" (visitors) on your site during a specific period of time. Your Web developer should be able to advise you on how this might be done. You may also want to develop an e-mail response feature to get consumer feedback on what they liked about the site, and other information they would like to see.**